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Punjab speaker seeks legal protection for local govt system

• Malik Ahmad Khan insists effective governance impossible sans empowered local bodies • ECP expresses inability to hold polls until next year, in absence of 'prerequisites' • Reminds province LG polls are their 'joint responsibility'; Punjab chief secretary assures CEC requirements will be met

By Amjad Mahmood & Iftikhar A. Khan

LAHORE/ISLAMABAD: With the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) expressing its inability to hold local government polls in the country's most populous province until next year, the Punjab Assembly speaker has called for a constitutional amendment to protect the tenure of local bodies and strengthen the LG system across the country.

Speaking at a press conference in Lahore on Friday, Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan said the Punjab Assembly had unanimously passed a resolution calling for an amendment to Article 140-A of the Constitution to ensure empowerment and protection of local bodies, along with mandatory and timely elections for effective governance.

He said 35 opposition members had also contributed to the resolution, underscoring its bipartisan support.

He emphasised that the proposed amendment aims to devolve power to the grassroots level, strengthening the democratic process through empowered institutions at the district, tehsil, and union council levels.

He warned that the absence of effective local governance weakens the relationship of trust between the state and the people.

The speaker found it alarming that in Punjab's 77-year history since independence, local governments have remained non-functional for about 50 years — a pattern he attributed to successive governments undermining the system.

While provincial assemblies cannot amend the Constitution, Mr Khan urged parliament to take the lead in ensuring that administrative powers reach the grassroots level.

He cautioned political parties against shortening LG terms for political convenience, stressing the need for every government to guarantee timely elections.

He suggested convening a multi-party conference to develop consensus and build a unified platform for introducing the 27th constitutional amendment.

No LG polls this year

Local government elections in Punjab will not be possible before the second quarter of next year, as the ECP will not have all the prerequisites to hold the electoral exercise during the current year.

This was the main takeaway from a meeting, presided over by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja in Islamabad on Friday, that reviewed preparations for the LG polls in the province.

At the meeting, the CEC reminded Punjab government representatives that holding local government elections in the province was the joint responsibility of both, the provincial government and the ECP. The commission called on the Punjab government to share all related rules, data, notifications, and maps to enable "timely" steps for the delimitation of constituencies.

Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman said the provincial government was sincere in holding LG elections and had already shared the draft delimitation rules under the Local Government Act 2025 with the ECP.

The CEC directed the ECP office to immediately review the draft rules and give its opinion to the provincial government. The chief secretary assured the forum that the draft of the Local Government (Conduct of Election) Rules would be sent to the ECP by Nov 15 for its feedback. He said the Punjab government would supply the demarcation notification and the classification of town corporations, municipal corporations, municipal committees, and tehsil councils to the ECP by Dec 22 this year.

Similarly, notifications regarding the number of additional union councils would be issued by Dec 31, along with certified maps of each town corporation, municipal corporation, municipal committee, and tehsil council by Jan 10, 2026.

Once these prerequisites were in place, the ECP would begin the delimitation process.

ATTOCK: Farmers harvest cauliflower in a field.—AFP

TLP ticket holders resign, accuse party of serving 'enemy agenda'

By Imran Gabol

LAHORE: All election ticket holders of the banned Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) from south Punjab announced on Friday that they had left the party, accusing it of pursuing an anti-state agenda that "aligns with the country's enemies".

The decision was announced at a press conference at Multan Arts Council by NA-150 ticket holder Muhammad Hussain Babar and others.

"This is not merely a political announcement but a call to conscience, belief and loyalty to our country," Mr Babar told reporters. He said the nation had been founded in the name of religion and vowed to defend it "by making every sacrifice".

Mr Babar said that Pakistan's armed forces handed India a historic defeat on the military front and it was a matter of survival and security of Pakistan. "After its defeat, the enemy resorted to paths of internal destabilisation and proxy war, but our forces foiled these conspiracies," he said.

He said the proscribed party's long march and protest calls had increased internal pressure on the state and armed forces and strengthened hostile elements.

Quoting an alleged video statement by elements of the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claiming links with extremists associated with TLP, he said the footage exposed the "nefarious designs of the enemy".

He said they had pledged to support the TLP for the protection of Khatm-i-Nubuwwat, supremacy of religion and the security of the country.

However, under the current circumstances, "we are parting ways from TLP because it is acting in the interests of the enemy and undermining Pakistan's institutions", he said.

He added, "We stand shoulder to shoulder with the armed forces to thwart the conspiracies of the enemy and for the protection of Pakistan and its institutions and, if need arises, will present ourselves on the field of action."

13 TLP workers sent to jail

Meanwhile, an anti-terrorism court ordered release of 114 TLP workers in murder and violence cases, while sending 13 others, including two women, to jail on judicial remand. Nawankot police had produced 127 suspects before the court after completing their physical remand.

The investigating officer said sticks and clubs were recovered from 13 suspects, while nothing was found on the others. Judge Manzer Ali Gill ordered the release of the 114 and remanded the remaining 13.

Wajih Ahmed Sheikh also contributed to this report

FIA rolls back graft case against Shabbar Zaidi

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI: In a surprising development, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which had recently registered a case against prominent chartered accountant and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) former chairman Shabbar Zaidi and others, has decided not to press charges against them and rolled back the matter on the 'request' of the field unit concerned, it emerged on Friday.

On Thursday, the FIA's Anti-Corruption Circle Karachi had booked Mr Zaidi and management of a private bank over allegations of issuing unauthorised income tax refunds amounting to Rs16 billion during his tenure as FBR chairman when the PTI was in power.

However, an official correspondence submitted by the FIA before a court on Oct 30 stated that the agency had decided not to put the case for trial and had converted it into 'C' class (cancelled).

The contents of the correspondence read: "The Director, FIA Karachi Zone, has been pleased to accord permission for cancellation of case FIR No. 32/2025 dated Oct 29, 2025 under Rule 24.7 of the Police Rule 1934 as well as classification of case as 'C-Class' and submission of discharge report before the honorable court special judge (Central-I) Karachi under section 173 of Criminal Procedure Code … against the then chairman FBR (1) Syed Muhammad Shabbar Zaidi."

No change in passport validity

• Info ministry denies claims 'not valid for travel to Israel' clause has been removed from passports • Says no discussions or agreements with CIA or Israel ever took place

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has slammed Indian media for peddling yet another "baseless and laughable" story — this time claiming that Islamabad had quietly removed the clause from its passports barring travel to Israel, *Dawn.com* reported.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting swiftly rubbished the report aired by *Republic TV*, calling it a "fabricated attempt to spread disinformation and create confusion."

In a statement issued on Friday, the ministry said no such move had ever been discussed or considered by the government.

India's *Republic TV* had alleged that Pakistan deleted the clause stating the passport was "not valid for travel to Israel."

The ministry also stated that no discussions or agreements had taken place with the CIA or Israel regarding the Gaza peace force.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also confirmed that the Pakistani passport remains unchanged, with the long-standing clause still clearly printed: "This passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel."

Exposing the fabricated report, the information ministry said Pakistan's stance on Israel has always been clear and unwavering.

"Pakistan has never recognised Israel, and there is absolutely no question of military cooperation," the statement said.

"Our support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination is firm and principled, and it has never wavered."

The ministry further noted that *Republic TV*'s story was not picked up by any credible regional or international outlet — proof, it said, of how "fabricated and unserious" the claim was.

It may be noted that the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports announced earlier this month that Pakistani passports are being upgraded with modern security features to prevent forgery and misuse.

The new passports will include the mother's name and visa pages featuring images of national landmarks that reflect Pakistan's cultural diversity. —Dawn Report

Govt aide's stance on Hamas invites minister's ire

Khawaja Asif voices his opposition to Danyal Chaudhry's remarks on Hamas' disarmament

KARACHI: Contentious remarks about the possible role of Pakistani troops in the Gaza peace force were criticised by a member of the federal cabinet on Friday, after a government aide claimed that Hamas would have to be disarmed in order for "things to move forward", *Dawn.com* reported.

The establishment of the International Stabilisation Force (ISF), composed mainly of troops from Muslim-majority countries, is a cornerstone of the US-brokered Gaza peace agreement. Officials familiar with the deliberations had earlier told *Dawn* that discussions within the government and military establishment on this issue are at an "advanced stage".

According to officials close to the discussions, an announcement from the federal government regarding the decision to send Pakistani troops to Gaza is expected soon.

In an interview on *ARY News* earlier this week, Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Danyal Chaudhry was asked about the mandate of the Gaza peace force.

"Pakistan and the other countries that will be chosen will make sure there is no extremism or violence … or that there is no cross-border attack. Pakistan will enforce that," he had said.

Mr Chaudhry also said that the security of any Pakistani soldier deputed for duty in the force would be the utmost priority.

"We will fulfil our duty and protect Muslim brothers and make sure there are no cross-border violations or terrorism."

Questioned if the mandate would also include the disarmament of Hamas, Mr Chaudhry had said: "Yes absolutely, if [Hamas] will be disarmed, only then the other force will be able to carry on. Things will only move forward after disarmament."

However, when questioned about the parliamentary aide's remarks, Khawaja Asif told *Geo News*: "Nothing like this is our target, or suits us".

"I will say God forbid on all these three remarks; what kind of statement has he given?"

Addressing the matter while slamming Chaudhry's remarks, Asif said Pakistan would follow whatever collective decision is taken for the force. He also questioned on whose behalf the federal parliamentary secretary was speaking in terms of enforcing peace.

He agreed when asked that the inclusion of any Pakistani troops in such a force in the face of continued Israeli bombing would cause a complicated situation. —Dawn Report